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RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 3385  
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH 0547  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 4210  
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0470  
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 6713  
RUEHVN/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE 0376  
RUEHJA/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 2642  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 JAKARTA 000216

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/RSP AND H  
H PASS TO JANNUZI AND LUSE  
NSC PASS TO DWALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2020  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEAN](#) [XC](#) [ID](#)  
SUBJECT: CPR ASSERTS ITS ROLE IN ASEAN

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Classified By: Political/Economic Counselor Peter Haas for reasons 1.4(  
b&d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The newly-installed ASEAN Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in Jakarta is working to define a policy and programmatic role that satisfies member-states' capitals desire for oversight of the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) while increasing ASEAN efficiency by concentrating more decision-making authority in Jakarta. The CPR's goal of rationalizing ASEC operations, as explained to the U.S. Resident Representative for ASEAN Affairs (poloff), will be critical for ASEC to cope with a mounting workload and resolve a chronic lack of capacity. Some ASEC officials, meanwhile, perceive the CPR as an added bureaucratic layer that lacks authority and which will further slow decision-making in ASEAN. How the three-way battle for authority among the CPR, ASEC and ASEAN capitals resolves itself will affect not just the efficiency and efficacy of U.S. engagement with ASEAN, but also the degree to which ASEAN can succeed in pursuing its stated objective of preeminence in Asia's emerging regional architecture. Both the CPR and ASEC have welcomed increased U.S. attention to ASEAN, and both are seeking to leverage it to enhance their own roles in ASEAN decision making. End summary.

BACKGROUND  
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¶2. (U) Article 12 of the Charter of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which came into force in December, 2008, calls for each of ASEAN's 10 member-states to appoint an Ambassador-level Permanent Representative (PR) to be based in Jakarta, collectively called the CPR. As defined in the Charter, the CPR's role includes supporting ASEC work, coordinating between ASEC and the "National Secretariats" based in each ASEAN capital, and facilitating ASEAN

cooperation with external dialogue partners such as the United States.

13. (C) Some ASEAN countries are further along in breaking out the PR position than others. The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam have each assigned PRs to ASEAN with their own staffs and separate office spaces. Smaller ASEAN member-states such as Burma, Cambodia, and Laos are still represented at ASEAN by their bilateral Ambassadors to Indonesia. Indonesia, ASEAN's most populous state and home to ASEC, has recalled its Ambassador to Cambodia, Mr. Ngurah Swajaya, to fill its PR slot. He will start in April, and Indonesian Foreign Ministry (KEMLU) contacts say that they are busy looking for premises for Indonesia's Permanent Mission.

NOT THE EU

14. (C) The ASEAN PRs with whom poloff spoke were quick to emphasize the incremental nature of the CPR effort to concentrate ASEAN decision-making authority in Jakarta. Singaporean PR Ambassador TK Lim said that policy is not part of the CPR mandate, and will still be driven by ASEAN capitals at the Senior Officials (SOM) and Senior Economic Officials (SEOM) levels. Thai PR Ambassador Manasvi Sirsodapol explained that since the SOM and SEOM mechanisms predated the CPR, they still constitute the critical reporting layer between ASEAN and line agencies back in ASEAN capitals. PR Manasvi hoped, however, that ASEAN-related communication would start to be routed through the CPR. "Otherwise the CPR will never assume full authority," he said. Vietnamese PR Ambassador Vu Dang Dzong predicted that

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in the future the CPR would play a "critical" role in ASEAN decision-making, but that the PRs were proceeding "step-by-step" and learning from the EU example.

15. (C) Longtime ASEC official Dhannan Sunoto assessed that the CPR would not evolve to acquire an EU-style mandate. He expressed skepticism about the CPR role, asserting that it simply added a new layer of bureaucracy to the existing Foreign Minister-, SOM-, and Director General-level mechanisms. He also expressed doubt that the PRs were the "right" ambassadors, noting their relatively junior levels and administrative backgrounds. (Comment: Singapore's PR Lim is former Ambassador to Vietnam; Vietnam's Vu was Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington; Thailand's PR Manasvi is a multilateral affairs expert with experience working at the UN in New York and Geneva, and was recently DDG of the Thai Foreign Ministry's ASEAN Affairs Division; the Philippines' Orly Mercado, with whom we have not yet met, is a former Defense Secretary. End comment.)

OVERSIGHT AND OVERHAUL?

16. (C) Both the PRs and ASEC staff noted that ASEC's current structure is not equipped to deal with the demands currently being placed upon it. ASEC's Dhannan noted that ASEAN now convenes approximately 800 meetings per year around the region. Vietnam's PR Vu noted that there were plenty of ASEAN programs in place, but that implementation was lacking, leading to Vietnam's tagline for its current ASEAN Chairmanship - "from Vision to Action".

17. (C) ASEC reorganized itself around the three traditional pillars, or "communities" -- the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC), and ASEAN Sociocultural Community (ASSC) -- and added a fourth pillar, the Corporate and Community Affairs Directorate, to unify messaging across all sectors. Recruiting staff at the middle levels has been difficult, with many key positions in the new structure left vacant. Poloff asked Philippines Deputy PR Tess Daza if current ASEAN member-states'

contributions were sufficient to fund new positions. She replied that the CPR now conducts a quarterly ASEC budget review, and the most recent review found that ASEC was only able to execute 70% of its budget last year, with much of the surplus left from unfilled positions. Daza assigned blame to a bottleneck in ASEC's application review and a lack of qualified candidates, but ASEC staff have complained that salary offers for mid-level officials are not competitive enough to attract good candidates.

18. (C) Singaporean ASEAN Mission First Secretary Winston Goh admitted that the establishment of the CPR was putting more demands on ASEC, but he said that ASEAN member-states had a duty to ensure that ASEAN and ASEC are "rules-based" organizations. He said that the CPR's oversight efforts aimed to put systems in place to ensure ASEC efficiency and accountability, including by instituting CPR working groups such as the "Budget Subcommittee" and "Development Cooperation Subcommittee" to conduct periodic meetings with relevant ASEC divisions. This year ASEC would undergo its first-ever "Tier One External Audit", Goh added. Poloff asked whether some might perceive these CPR efforts as aiming to constrict ASEC activity, especially in light of ASEAN member-states' hesitancy to commit greater funding to ASEAN. Goh replied that on the contrary the goal was to rationalize the organization to lay a better foundation for an expanded role. PR Vu from Vietnam echoed this sentiment, saying that the CPR was trying to make ASEC both more efficient and more

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effective.

19. (C) The CPR has evinced particular interest in inserting itself into ASEAN dialogue with its donors and dialogue partners. Deputy PR Daza of the Philippines, the U.S.' ASEAN "country coordinator" this year, asserted that the CPR would assume the Director General-level function in coordinating with ASEAN dialogue partners, and said that ASEAN workplans with all dialogue partners now required CPR approval. (Comment: If ASEC and the CPR no longer needed to consult ASEAN capitals on workplans with dialogue partners, this would successfully concentrate an important ASEAN programmatic component in Jakarta. The Philippines will convene a DG-level "working group" between the CPR and the USG in Jakarta on March 17. End comment.)

110. (C) Australian Embassy Political and Economic Minister Counselor Michael Bliss and AusAID's Jennifer Hoverman commented to poloff that CPR and ASEC were both trying to define their authorities, and that ASEC was feeling chastened by the CPR's placement. According to Hoverman, ASEC was receiving mixed messages from member-states on whether it was supposed to engage in policy and analysis or just to be a facilitating body. She commented that the CPR's increased level of interest in ASEC's work could prove crippling to an organization already debilitated by an excessive focus on process. Moreover, according to Hoverman, some ASEAN member-states were more supportive of ASEC than others, with Singapore and Malaysia in the former camp, and the Philippines being an outspoken critic. The Australians believed that Indonesia's role would be critical to how the CPR-ASEC dynamic played out, and were eagerly awaiting the arrival of Indonesia's PR-designate.

COMMENT: WELCOMING THE U.S.  
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111. (C) Both the CPR and ASEC have welcomed our intention to open a Permanent Mission and send a resident Ambassador to ASEAN. ASEC's Dhannan opined that U.S. and ASEAN strategic interests with ASEAN "overlap 85%" and that every ASEAN member, including Burma, are pleased with what they perceive as a renewal in U.S. interest in ASEAN. Having an Ambassador to ASEAN would "give a face" to U.S.-ASEAN cooperation, according to Dhannan, and would get us away from a "hit-and-run" relationship managed primarily by consultants

and based on money. Vietnam's PR Vu called the United States "ASEAN's most important partner" and said he saw increased U.S. engagement as not just an opportunity for ASEAN but also for Vietnam as it holds ASEAN's rotating chair this year.

¶12. (C) Both the CPR and SEC will seek to leverage the presence of dialogue partners' Jakarta-based representatives to ASEAN to gain the upper hand in the ongoing struggle for authority. We have been impressed by the apparent

seriousness of purpose of the ASEAN PRs here, and agree with their basic assessment that ASEAN would benefit from more organizational guidance. A strengthening of CPR decision-making authority would dovetail with our own efforts to push ASEAN-specific work out to the region.

¶13. (C) Based on comments we have heard from ASEC staff, morale is flagging as the workload is increasing, and the CPR is adding to that. The question is to what end: if the CPR pursues its oversight role without formulating a concomitant growth plan, including consideration of changing ASEAN's rigid funding structure, then suspicions will grow that the CPR has been put in place to stymie ASEC rather than to foster it. We and other like-minded dialogue partners also

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suspect that increased CPR attention also has something to do with reservations about the dynamic leadership of ASEAN Secretary-General, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, who has been an energetic champion of both ASEC centrality and the "ASEAN brand".

¶14. (C) If U.S. policy is to support ASEAN integration and community-building efforts, then our ASEAN programs and policies need both to support Dr. Surin's efforts and bolster CPR authority vis-a-vis the ASEAN capitals. The rapid nomination and confirmation of a resident U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN will help. For the time being, we should give the CPR the benefit of the doubt and utilize it as a key ASEAN interlocutor and channel. End Comment.

¶15. (C) This message was sent by the Resident Representative of the Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs.

HUME